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Manion Hall, Historic Schoolhouse, to Have New Life as a Home

Who said there are no happy endings...

Once upon a time there was an historic one room school house which served generations of Duxbury school children and later became a center for religious education for a town church. When that church was sold as a site for a new cultural center for the arts in town, the future of the one room school house looked dim. Architectural plans did not include what had come to be known as Manion Hall. The building would be demolished if someone didn't come forth and offer to remove and preserve it.

Months passed and newspaper accounts and attempts from Duxbury Rural & Historical Society to stir interest in its preservation seemed to fail. A teen center? No money. A senior citizens' center? No money. Alas...

January came and plans would proceed with the demolition.

Enter Hugh Dahlen — second to youngest of the 5 Dahlen brothers and 3 Dahlen sisters, a longtime Duxbury resident and an aficionado of post and beam construction of yesteryear.

He and Linda, his wife of 9 years, and their 2 children, Conor, 7, and Kelsey, 5, had recently returned to Duxbury and were renting an antique home after spending a couple of years in Bourne.

"This is exactly what he wanted to do," said Linda Dahlen of her husband's dream to relocate and reconstruct the historic building as a home for his family. "We both

love the post and beam style and appreciate antiques. We're overjoyed."

Hugh brought his father, John, a longtime Duxbury resident and several of his brothers, including Shawn, a well-known area builder to assess the move.

All confirmed his own belief that the building was well constructed and could be successfully disassembled and reconstructed as a home.

All that waited was confirmation from the Ellison Center for the Arts Committee and its Buildings Chairman, former town moderator Charlie Fargo, it was a "go."

According to Fargo, no one wanted to see the building destroyed and all were happy that it would have a new life as a home.

Dahlen and a friend will begin next week dismantling the structure after applying for a permit with the town. Plans call for storing the materials until Dahlen can find a lot, hopefully in town.

"I'm very grateful to the Ellison Committee. I would have hated to see it bulldozed. It would have been a complete waste. We'll do our best to keep it looking as it always has from the exterior. It's a piece of the town's history," he said.

Dahlen plans to take it slow and carefully will label each piece of structure from windows to rafters. He will stack and store the material in town. Dahlen compared the reassembling job to putting together a 3D puzzle. Disassembly will be painstaking process so as not to ruin any of the wood.

Care will be taken to dismantle each mortise and tenon. These are oak pegs locked on the main beam with smaller rafters. He plans to label each, 1 to 100 ABC...

The building is 28 by 40 feet with a very high open punched tin ceiling.

Hugh helped his father build a post and beam house in Deer Isle, ME. He said it has always been his favorite style. Manion Hall will lend itself well to conversion as a 2-story home.

"It's wide open downstairs for a master bedroom, living room, and kitchen with room for a second story with 3 bedrooms and a full bath."

For Dahlen it will be a labor of love.

"All I really know about the school house is that it was constructed in 1878 and that it's well-built. I want to learn more about its history from the Historical Society. They just don't construct houses today like they used to. This home will have a lot of character and history. We're thrilled," he said.



Manion Hall